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Lad Culture as a Sticky Atmosphere: Navigating Sexism and Misogyny in the Student-Centred Nighttime Economy

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Abstract

'Lad culture' has become a popular term for making sense of sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment in Higher Education in the UK. However, a gap exists in understanding student negotiations of the nighttime economy, and how spatial elements shape the affective dimensions of lad culture experiences. In this article, we offer the concept of 'sticky atmospheres', a combination of Sara Ahmed's 'sticky affects' and Ben Anderson's 'affective atmospheres'. We demonstrate the usefulness of 'sticky atmospheres' by analysing data produced in co-operative inquiry-inspired discussions with a Student Union 'Gender Society'. In doing so, we offer an understanding of the student-centred nighttime economy through participants' accounts of proximity to the sticky object, described as a pervasive atmosphere. However, we also explore the potential for atmospheric change.

Keywords: lad culture, nighttime economy, sexism, affect.

Introduction

'Lad culture' has become a ubiquitous term in youth and popular media, social commentaries, news and on the campuses of British Universities. We recognise 'lad culture' as a problematic term, especially as it suggests cohesion. The term is applied in a broad, heterogeneous way across these sites; however, it is typically used to define a set of practices, behaviours and activities often associated with University-aged men and characterised by a homosociality that endorses, in different degrees, misogyny, sexism, homophobia and, in its most extreme cases, sexual violence (Phipps & Young 2015a). Often aligned with a 'toxic masculinity', lad culture is described through

notions of excessive alcohol consumption, sports and ‘banter’ (Phipps and Young 2013). Lad culture has also been understood through neoliberal notions of competitiveness: Phipps and Young (2015a) mention drinking games, for example. A body of work provides pertinent accounts of lad culture across different levels of education (e.g. Dempster 2009, 2011; Jackson 2006, 2010; Jackson & Dempster 2009; Jackson & Sundaram 2018; Phipps and Young 2013, 2015a, 2015b). In this article, we deepen these accounts, exploring how the student-centred nighttime economy shapes understandings of the affective components of lad culture.

Drinking cultures are central to lad culture, evidenced by a widely publicised use of lad culture rhetoric in promotional material. Examples include Cardiff Metropolitan Student Union posters advertising Freshers events that featured a person whose t-shirt read ‘I was raping a woman last night and she cried’. In 2013, Leeds-based events company Tequila UK promoted a themed nightclub event named ‘Freshers Violation’. The video advertisement asked male students how they were going to ‘violate’ female students, with responses including “fist them in the ass” and that women were “gonna get raped”. While these examples provoked national condemnation, the use of sexist and objectifying images of women or sexualising ‘themed’ nights (e.g. pimps and hoes, sluts and geeks) have become a normalised part of the visual and spatial landscape of student nightlife. (See Hubbard [2013] for an analysis of Carnage (UK), a student events company who promote ‘carnivalesque’ student-centred entertainment).

Given the prevalence of sexism in student-centred nighttime promotional material, it is unsurprising that reports show high levels of sexual harassment. One BBC report found that 58% of 18-24 years old female students experienced harassment on nights out (2016). A Drinkaware (2015) survey revealed similar results: 54% of women reported sexually harassment (comments/abuse and touching), and 51% of these

respondents said such harassment happens almost every time they go out. Meanwhile the NUS report on lad culture, *That's What She Said* (Phipps & Young 2013), suggests lad culture is "largely located in the social side of university life" (28), and provides first-hand accounts of female students' experiences of lad culture within the University.

Such reports show how University drinking cultures remain problematic for young women, while other researchers note the gendering of drinking spaces as important (e.g. Dempster 2011; Griffin et al. 2013; Measham & Brain 2005: Kavanaugh 2015). However, a paucity of work exists on the peripheral spaces of education as central to the reproduction of campus-based sexism and misogyny. Meanwhile, feminist geographers have identified the importance of emotion and affect in the shaping of gendered spatial relations (e.g. Davidson and Bondi 2004; Bondi et al. 2002). And yet, despite the gendering of space in geography, solidified by journals like *Gender, Place and Culture*, more work is needed on making spaces of sexism visible (Valentine, Jackson & Mayblin 2014, 114). A keyword search in *Gender, Place and Culture* for the term 'sexism' returns only two results, including Valentine, Jackson and Mayblin's (2014) article, which calls for more attention to sexism within the journal. We address these gaps, contributing an account of the student-centred nighttime economy and its associations with lad culture as creating an atmosphere where affect travels and sticks to particular bodies.

In this article, we ask: Where does affect stick, how does it function, move and shape the experiences of the student-centred nighttime economy? How do students negotiate these spaces? And, what new relations are possible? To answer these questions, we explore discussion between 7 students involved in a Student Union 'Gender Society'. The sample is small, but we suggest it allows us to drill into the data, permitting in-depth understandings of students' negotiations of the nighttime economy.

Our analysis shows how drinking spaces were experienced as full of 'sticky affect' (Ahmed 2010). As feminist researchers, we are committed to identifying possible new relations, ways in which space could be otherwise. In our analysis we suggest students negotiate lad culture in the nighttime economy through neoliberal discourses of self-management; however, we also identify the atmosphere as flexible and fluid, opening up opportunities for feminist researchers to imagine other possibilities.

To set the scene, we provide an overview of lad culture in education, before turning to the nighttime economy. We then introduce our project, drawing together Ahmed's (2004, 2010) 'sticky affect' and Anderson's (2009) 'affective atmospheres'. In analysing the 'sticky atmosphere' of lad culture, our work develops a framework for understanding how students negotiate lad culture in the nighttime economy, demonstrating the capacity of space to facilitate (and challenge) the persistence of sexism and misogyny within University campus culture.

Lad culture and the nighttime economy

'Lad culture' is normally associated with British Higher Education. Debates in the UK resemble similar ones internationally such as 'bro' and 'frat culture' in the US (Chrisler et al. 2012; Phipps 2017), and 'eve-teasing' in South Asian countries (Akhtar 2013). In Australia, student inductions take place in an orientation week ('O week'), which has become known as 'the red zone' given the sexual harassment and rape that occurs (EROC Australia 2018). This complex global context is compounded further by the breadth of behaviours that fall under campus-based misogyny (from sexist banter to physical assault and rape). Thus, we do not give lad culture ontological security. In our research, we problematize the term as permitting sexism and misogyny to continue

outside of education, without recourse to the language of ‘lad culture’ (Diaz-Fernandez & Evans 2019).

In Britain, the term lad culture emerged out of seismic shifts in the gendered spaces of education. Against a backdrop of gains made by liberal feminists, including equal opportunity policy, delayed motherhood, and a shift in attitudes around the education of women, a ‘postfeminist panic’ has emerged (Ringrose 2013), wherein concern exists around the academic achievements of young boys and men. Jackson (2010) and Jackson and Dempster (2015) suggest lad culture in earlier education (i.e. before University) emerges because academic achievement and ‘hard work’ are gendered. Drawing on hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell 1995), they describe a pre-University masculinity, where ‘cool’ equates to effortless academic achievement and successful heterosexuality, which is nevertheless a “self-worth protection strategy” (Jackson 2002, 37) driven by academic insecurities, the possibility of failure, and fear of being labelled as ‘feminine’ or ‘queer’ (Jackson & Dempster 2009).

In Higher Education, Phipps and Young (2015a) suggest lad culture embodies a retro-sexism that reclaims traditionally male territory. In defining characteristics of lad culture, they identify a ‘pack mentality’ that supports expressions of sexism, misogyny and homophobia, permissible through ‘banter’ and the knowing wink of postfeminist irony.

Phipps and Young (2015a) place lad culture within a neoliberalisation of the University, where privatisation and corporate competition creates a context where lad culture can flourish. They suggest that, over time, ‘lad culture’ has responded to political, cultural and social change, making the term fluid and open to change. In doing so, Phipps and Young (2015a) locate lad culture in historical context, for example ‘lad culture’ was also used to define 1950s Playboy readers, understood as a response to the

post-war consumer culture boom, women's changing status, and new ideas circulating about sexuality. In light of this genealogy, they suggest in today's neoliberal University masculinity is defined through individualism and alongside institutional metrics (e.g. in the UK, these include the National Student Survey, Teaching Excellence Framework and Research Excellence Framework), so that "older practices such as the legendary 'fuck a fresher' race existing alongside more neoliberalised systems of monitoring and measurement such as charting sexual conquests" (Phipps & Young 2015a, 313).

Competition is a pivotal characteristic of lad culture, as a way of negotiating and hierarchizing masculinity (Dempster 2011). In Dempster's (2009) interviews with male University students, he found drinking large amounts of alcohol often symbolized successful masculinity, where heavy drinking is considered the "mark of a man" (495). Like Dempster (2009), we would suggest drinking, and - more crucially - drinking spaces, play an important role in shaping affect within student social life. The culture of the student-centred nighttime economy is located in a broader context of gendered drinking cultures in the UK, which we turn to below.

Like the term 'lad culture' in UK education, the gendering of the nighttime economy is a product of societal change, including a shift away from manufacturing-related industries and the expansion of consumer culture and the leisure industries (Hobbs et al. 2005; Jayne et al. 2006; Williams 2008). Workforce shifts included the entrance of women into the public sphere, and by turns a marketing campaign by industries within the nighttime economy to incorporate women into their address. A substantial part of the £66 billion pound nighttime economy is derived from the sale of alcohol (Night Time Industries Association 2017).

The UK nighttime economy has been described as 'the culture of intoxication' and 'binge Britain' (see Measham and Brain [2005] and Eldridge and Roberts [2008]

for a discussion of these terms). Constructs circulating around these terms are also deeply gendered. Griffin et al. (2013), for example, show how historical discourses of femininity make the nighttime economy 'impossible spaces' for young women, requiring careful distancing from positions of drinking 'like a man' or inhabiting a 'boring' feminine position that sits in opposition to contemporary notions of femininity as liberated, free and self-determined. Griffin et al. (2013), along with others, also highlight how class shapes women's experience, where constructs of trashy, loud, excessive femininity intersect with historical femininity as the bastion of virtue, purity and respectability.

Drinking cultures have further been understood as difficult spaces for women because of their masculinised underpinnings. Fear of violence in the nighttime economy is high (Kavanaugh 2015; Meyer 2010; Sheard 2011). For example, Sheard (2011) found that, in women's accounts of the nighttime economy, self-management (e.g. drinking in 'safe' spaces, strategizing with female drinking companions) featured heavily in mitigating the risks of sexual harassment (see also Meyer [2010] and Gunby et al. [2017]). This incessant watchful mode carries heavy affective baggage for women, while men's accounts of the nighttime economy also highlight the threat of (and masculine capital associated with) violence (Tomsen 1997; Kavanaugh 2015).

By contrast to accounts of gender in the nighttime economy, less work has explored these spaces as central to the reproduction of lad culture. Thus, while some highlight how lad culture shapes the 'official' spaces of education (e.g. the lecture room, student-to-student learning, see Jackson et al. [2015] and Jackson and Sundaram [2018]), we also locate lad culture in education's informal spaces. While drinking has long been a characteristic of the British figure of 'the student' (Dempster 2011), we propose a melting-pot of lad culture, alongside the neoliberalisation of education and

the nighttime economy, has created an intensely affective space, defined through sexism and misogyny. Below, we introduce our data and present the concept sticky atmospheres through Ahmed's 'sticky affects' and Anderson's 'affective atmospheres'.

A sticky atmos-sphere (method + methodology)

In this article, we draw on a small sample of 7 students, whose data we collected as part of a larger project titled 'Feeling Lad Culture', the aim of which is to understand the affective dimensions of lad culture within British Higher Education. That is, our focus in this project is not on men, or 'the lads', per say, but on the different ways students understand and experience lad culture - although, of course, we are interested in how masculinities shape lad culture, as evidenced in our review above, and recognise the important contributions from geographies of men and masculinities (e.g. Berg & Longhurst 2003; van Hoven & Hörschelmann 2005). Where previous research has documented these experiences for mostly white female students (Phipps & Young 2013), we wanted to understand the student experience of campus-based sexism and misogyny differently, including non-white and ethnic minority students, LGBT*QA+ students, and students with a vested interest in gender and gender inequality, to represent the diversity of students in Higher Education. In the overall project, 29 students have taken part, forming a total of 5 groups.

The 7 participants discussed in this article were from a Student Union 'Gender Society'. We acknowledge this subsection of our overall project is small: our aim in this paper is not to provide comparisons between the different participant groups, and, given our diverse data set, such comparisons would be unavoidable. We make no claims to generalise our findings, with the specificities of how atmospheres stick to different bodies being different depending on race, ethnicity, gender-identity and sexuality.

Given the gaps in the literature, we work with our small sample to provide depth, focus, and to illuminate the challenges and opportunities the concept of 'sticky atmospheres' permits for those seeking to address campus-based sexism and misogyny.

The Gender Society group came from a post-1992 campus and city-based University in the Midlands, UK. The group already met regularly, in accordance with Union guidelines on Societies. They held discussions and participated in peer-to-peer learning on topics such as gender (in)equality, media representation and feminism. Demographically, the Gender Society was largely white and British (except Gwen, who was South Korean), between the ages of 18-21, and cisgender: 5 identified as female and 2 as male. Their homogeneity in these terms could be seen as an issue in the larger project aims to hear diverse student voices: however, we believe this group's composition speaks volumes about already-acknowledged issues with campus-based feminism (Crossley 2017). Ethical approval was gained: participant names and other information (including venues and street names) are anonymised, and participants were offered the right-to-withdraw.

Our reasons for identifying this group was twofold. First, feminism is culturally popular, especially in the University, but the effects of this popularity are ambiguous. Feminism is often incorporated as a marketable object or in ways that do not lead to social change (see Riley et al. 2017; Gill 2017). Yet, second, campus-based feminist activism has made gains, for instance in successful Union campaigns: for example, in 2013, more than 20 University Unions banned Robin Thicke's song *Blurred Lines* for its lyrics about non-consensual sex; and in 2014 Cardiff University Student Union cancelled an event featuring social media celebrity Dapper Laughs, who is known for sexist and objectifying humour and jokes about rape (see Lewis et al. [2018] on feminist

activism on University campuses). Thus, students participating in Student Union gender groups could provide a unique account of lad culture.

Data was gathered by adapting methods from co-operative inquiry, an approach within action research. These techniques allow for "pragmatic and constructed practical knowings that are based in the experience and action of those engaged in the inquiry process" (Riley & Reason 2015, 170). This permitted a collaborative and shared practice, allowing us to be guided by the interests of the Gender Society participants. Data was collected over three meetings between February and April 2017. Each meeting was preliminary sketched by us: however, we followed a semi-structured approach, allowing participants to explore and include topics they deemed relevant. Meetings lasted between 1 to 3 hours. Given the project understood lad culture as flexible, fluid and open to interpretation, including a variety of beliefs and behaviours, the questions asked reminded open, for example: "How would you describe 'lad culture' and in what context?", "How does 'lad culture' in certain spaces make you feel?", and "where is 'lad culture' move visible?". We also included creative activities, for example drawing and writing answers to such questions, so participants could develop their ideas before contributing to discussions.

Meetings were transcribed by the first author, after which we cycled through the data to identify common themes, contradictions, feelings, and challenges towards lad culture. During the analysis, it appeared to us that the Gender Society discussion focused heavily on recounting specific stories about nights out, the spaces of lad culture (pubs, clubs, bars), and the relationship between the nighttime economy and the sexism and misogyny therein.

Having identified the dominance of stories in our participant's talk, we read the data through the lens of 'affect theory'. Theories of affect are multiple (Gregg &

Seigworth 2010). Our approach, like many, is a feminist one, seeing affect as intimately bound to the reproduction of gender relations (Davidson & Bondi 2004). We also understand affect as located in the discursive and the pre-discursive. Affect, for us, is dynamic, in constant interplay, making it difficult – if not impossible – to separate the cultural from the psychic, emotion from affect, or the cognitive from the bodily (see Diaz-Fernandez & Evans [2019] for a full account). For us, this means recognising the political and ideological forces of affect, something others have argued is missing in accounts rooted in bodily intensity (e.g. see Thien [2005] and Leys [2011] for critique).

With these caveats in mind, this article draws from Ahmed's (2004, 2010) phenomenological discussion of 'sticky affects' and, from geography, Anderson's (2009) notion of 'affective atmospheres'. For Ahmed (2004), signs, objects and events are affective when they leave an impression, when they press upon us. Some degree of physical proximity to that object is necessary for such an impression. And yet, "[h]ow the object impresses (upon) us may depend on histories that remain alive insofar as they have already left their impressions" (2004, 8). That is, affect is social, political and historical. The word 'slut', for example, might impress upon us when it comes close, when we are accused of 'being a slut'. However, this impression is also the result of a longer history of sexism and misogyny, shaped by associations between women, morality, sexuality, and so on (Kofoed & Ringrose 2012). Some impressions stick to some bodies (e.g. women) more than others: some objects are stickier than others.

One element that we elucidate in this article is how Ahmed's (2004, 2010) sticky affects occur in *situations*. Her reflections on these situations include, for example, feeling the atmosphere in a room, or the alienation experienced in the cinema when others laugh at a film that you do not find funny. Thus, sticky affects also have a spatial component. While there are rich and nuanced analysis of gender, space and

affect (e.g. the collection in Davidson and Bondi [2004]), we contribute to these discussions, exploring how spatial affects leave impressions that stick. To move towards thinking lad culture as spatialy sticky, we draw parallels between Ahmed's sticky affects and Anderson's 'affective atmospheres': indeed, both Ahmed and Anderson begin with the same starting point, citing Brennan's (2002) opening question in *The Transmission of Affect*, when she asks "Is there anyone who had not, at least once, walked into a room and "felt the atmosphere"?" (1). We turn to Anderson below.

The concept of atmosphere has received much attention as a theory and methodology (Sumartojo & Pink 2018). Of note, Shaw (2014) employed the concept of affective atmospheres in the nighttime economy, in understanding the experiences of taxi drivers and street cleaners. In Anderson's (2009) account, he suggests 'affective atmospheres' is productive because it conceptualises affect as having a spatial quality, what he describes as the "intensive spatialities of atmos-spheres" (80). He draws on Böhme's (1993) discussion of the materialist etymology of 'atmosphere'. In Bohme's formulation, 'atmos' describes how space can fill with feelings, similar to how gas or vapour fills space. The 'sphere' is the spatial organisation into a round figure or surface (although the material space does not need to be round, the spherical is, however, all-encompassing). Exploring how 'atmos' and 'sphere' work together, Anderson defines the affective atmosphere as one that surrounds an object, including people and things.

A useful element of Anderson's (2009) discussion is how he understands atmosphere as having an 'unfinished' quality, belonging to no particular object. For example, the affect that circulates in bars, clubs and pubs can be created by the space itself, or by the clientele on any given night; it can be a result of lighting and furnishing; it can be defined by the location of that space within another space, such as any given establishment's location within the city (e.g. the 'up-market', the 'commercial', or the

student area). An affective atmosphere is therefore indefinite, belonging to no particular person or thing, but to multiple relations. It is this quality, according to Anderson (2009), that also means the affective atmosphere captures the ambiguity of affect, including both its representational and non-representational elements (or the distinction between emotion and affect). In this, we read Anderson's (2009) account of the affective atmosphere as reflecting our account of affect as dynamic (Diaz-Fernandez & Evans 2019).

Our contribution in this article is thus, first, to offer an account of student negotiations of University-based lad culture in the nighttime economy, where there is a paucity of work bridging these spheres, and, second, to explore the usefulness of bringing together 'sticky affects' and 'affective atmospheres' as 'sticky atmospheres'. Working 'sticky affects' and 'affective atmospheres' together, we propose that the concept of sticky atmospheres is valuable in exposing how the atmosphere of the student-centred nighttime economy creates impressions. We argue that the affect circulating in this atmosphere sticks, shaped by wider cultural atmospheres, including the heightening of sexism on University campuses and, concurrently, in the bars, pubs and clubs that capitalize on the emergence of this culture.

We propose that sticky atmospheres help us deepen our account of the student-centred nighttime economy in that it helps us understand "affective experience as occurring beyond, around, and alongside the formation of subjectivity" (Anderson 2006, 77). Although there are differences in Ahmed's sticky affects and Anderson's affective atmospheres, we understand these as complimentary. Namely, we highlight: 1) how both concepts understand affect as proximal: through a proximity that is historically and culturally located, or one that is material, based on being submerged in the atmosphere; 2) that neither locate affect in the individual or as an essential component of a particular

space, where both highlight the way affect travels, moves and is part of relational networks of objects, actants, and locations; and, 3) that they both capture how affect slips between non-representation and representation, and in doing so are able to attend to "how the social relates to the affective and emotive dimensions of life" (Anderson 2009, 80).

With this concept, we also suggest it poses a new question of lad culture, namely: Where does affect stick, how does it function, move and shape the experiences of the student-centred nighttime economy? Below we consider the spaces and people identified as creating the atmosphere of lad culture. We then move to our participant's resistances to proximity with lad culture's affective atmospheres, and finally we discuss the way participants understood the sticky atmosphere of lad culture as pervasive.

Locating (liquid) lads

As we have argued, although lad culture in the UK tends to emerge from the space of the University, it is made sense of predominantly through education's peripheral activities, especially student social life within the context of a nighttime economy. Our participants were also aware of this association, making sense of lad culture in the nighttime economy through its relation to drinking culture, for example:

Extract 1

Anne: But I think they [the lads] *could use like-like the night time cos it's-people always use the excuse of drink to like kinda like make as an excuse for any kind of behaviour so… it* [lad behaviour] *could still be like cheeky in the daytime but excuse me, it's like, oh, if it's night I think it's a bit more exaggerated as I-as you do, like, if you drank a fair few. But yeah I think it's still around predominately cos they still hang around the same groups and a lot of sports just take place in the daytime, so.*

[later in the conversation]

Silvia: Do you think there's less in the day time or in other ways-

Anne: -well maybe like, yeah it's like less like obvious maybe?-

Joe: -I think it's just cos of the different environments-

Anne: -yeah-

Joe: -on the day and night cos there's not club environments during the day, like there isn't. Cos you get the odd group or something with the, like, shout at girls in the streets and stuff as Gwen said, but uhm… on the night time is like you're like in a mass aren't ya, you're like in a massive group of people and you can disappear like that if you want-

Anne and Mary: -yeah-

Joe: -so… that's why it's so predominant there I think-

Above, our participants negotiated what differentiates lad culture experiences in the day and nighttime. Their sense making fitted cultural ideas that daytime is based on order, with darkness "allowing potentially transgressive behaviours to occur under a veil of anonymity" (Williams 2008, 518). They thus contrast two atmospheres: one where lad culture was present but out-of-place, and another in which laddish behaviour was "*exaggerated*". In daylight hours, lad culture was still present (e.g. "*like shout at girls in the streets and stuff*"), but our participants positioned these experiences as an excess or overspill from the nighttime. Daytime experiences of lad culture were understood as "*less obvious*", with Joe suggesting that the difference between the two was located not in the space itself (i.e. the space remained the same), but in the "*different environments*" created in the contrast between day and night.

In this account, the atmosphere had a gas-like quality, filling the space (Anderson 2009), whereby the student-centred nighttime economy became one where "*you're like in a mass*", providing cover for lad behaviour. Our participants understood

the atmospheres of the night as excess, similar to the way news media often present drinking cultures (Measham & Brain 2005). To discuss the nighttime was to also talk in terms of how drinking transformed space, where alcohol consumption permitted "*any kind of behaviour*".

In contrast, the construct of 'the lad' itself was vague and difficult to define. Our participants deconstructed the idea of 'the lad' and were unsure as to whose presence created the sensation of lad culture. For example:

Extract 2

Joe: I think 'lad', 'lad' is very like stereotypes, it's like… I think when people think of 'lad' they think of sport, cos you think of certain clothing, you think of certain hairstyle, you think of certain… you think they might like sports, but on the surface a lad can be anyone[…]

Extract 3

Gwen: Sometimes I would feel sad cos like now I kinda like try to distinguish if they're [men Gwen knows] like trying to be cool lads who finding someone to do some moves or having a good time with friends. Cos like I had a few experiences – in the past I would try to distinguish what does-what does it [the friendship/relationship] mean and what should I avoid and stuff, and it'd be better if everyone could have a fun time rather than one doing something boring and like distinguish if he's lad or not.

Both extracts problematize the lad. Elsewhere we discuss this construct as the 'liquid lad' (Diaz-Fernandez, forthcoming). For Joe, this meant the existence of a particular stereotype, a combination of sport, clothes and hair. However, 'the lad' could really "*be anyone*". Likewise, for Gwen, the liquid lad created a sense of uncertainty, with the only distinguishing feature being their inauthenticity, as someone who was

"*trying to be cool*" (emphasis added). Here also was a recognition of women's additional labour, where Gwen presented the arduous task of having to work out whether someone was simply trying "*to do some moves*", which she contrasted with "*having a good time with friends*".

The extracts above provide insight into how our participants understood the production of lad culture, in space and in the bodies of particular people. With the liquid quality to the lad, we argue that lad culture within the University could be understood as better defined by the spaces that (largely) young heterosexual men occupy. Thinking of this space as a sticky atmosphere means that individuals within the space are not simply lads (the lads being potentially anyone), but become and leave an impression as lads within particular spaces. Below we turn to the participants' experiences of lad culture within the student-centred nighttime economy.

Getting Lads to Go Away

One dominant theme in the data was the sharing of stories of nights out and experiences that students understood as reflective of lad culture therein. These stories were nearly always located within clubs, pubs and on the streets at night. Although some participants shared stories pertaining to lad culture within student accommodation, few other spaces where mentioned. For the women in the group, these stories reinforced reports of sexual harassment in the nighttime economy (Drinkaware 2015; Meyer 2010; Phipps & Young 2013; Sheard 2011). However, they also demonstrated our participants' willingness to resist. For example:

Extract 4

Anne: […]the night was getting pretty like, dead. A good song came on, and me and Rose were just going for it cos we loved it so much. Uhm… and this guy out of nowhere, who's quite big built, just like-kept like-got really rowdy and he was pushing and, like, and then literary we were just like 'go away'. He doesn't go away, I start using more physical force, I think you [Mary] *joined in as well. I just was like, get him away, he kept going back and at one point he puts his arms around both Mary and Rose, and that when it was like instinct tells 'not having it'. Cos I thought even if I can handle myself, knowing these two girls who, like. So well, I was like 'I want to make sure they're okay' like protect them, like, make sure they get home safely. So I like push him away […]cos I kept saying I was throwing him. I was like 'I will fight you if you don't back off', like 'effing try me' cos I was getting, I was just having none of it. And then he was like 'let me in, let me in' within a quick instance I took off my shoe and it was-I was just like caught up really. I was so angry. I was like that angry I was like 'come on let him' eh 'I'll effing have ya'. And then at this point Mary already got security guards so he buggered off.*

In the extract, Anne provided an account of a changing atmosphere, from a joyful "*just going for it*" to anger, which was felt by Anne through the presence of a particular body, a "*guy… who's quite big built*". Anne's talk showed the efforts made to avoid close proximity to this man, who nevertheless seemed to reappear, and continued to shape the atmosphere of the space: "*I just was like, get him away, he kept going back*".

The response to this affective atmosphere was resistance, retaliation, strength and protectionism. Anne recounted the story as involving a sudden escalation of proximity, from pushing to direct physical contact (with his arms around two of the women she was with), which Anne identified as the moment she was "*'not having it'*". Anne constructed a dominant position of being able to "*handle*" herself, one that performs neoliberal ideals of resilience, but presented the risks of this invasion of space

as sticking around longer for other women. Consequently, in the atmosphere of violence he created, Anne expressed a desire to "*protect*" and to "*make sure they [other women] get home safely*". Interestingly shoes appeared across the participants' discussion as a tool to resist infringements on space: in another part of the data, Eve told a similar story of unwanted attention, to which she claims "*I am strong, and I kicked him with my Doc. Martens so… he went away*".

For other participants, the stories of lad culture in the nighttime economy oriented towards other ways of avoiding the atmosphere. In the extract below, Mary described the stickiness of lad culture leaving her with a desire to escape.

Extract 5

Mary: Like, I've had this situation where I've been out with like a big group of friends and this guy would literary not leave me alone. I walked to the other side of my group and then I walked back, I would go-go in the middle and he would follow so thought 'okay, I'm not gonna shake him off' and that's like 'I lose him myself' so I walked around the whole club I lo-like-I let loose of my friends and like basically my security of safety just to get this guy off of me. So, I walked around, I walked through the middle, like, went around people a few times kind of thing […]

In contrast to Anne's description of physically fighting off unwanted attention, Mary's story involved resisting lad culture by means of evasion and avoidance. Despite this, there were similarities in how both participants understood lad culture as a physical proximity to the object that they did not want to be close to, with both finding ways of removing the object that emphasized their agency: "*'I lose him myself'*". For Mary, this meant recounting how she goes from moving around her friendship group to, ultimately, requiring her to walk "*around the whole club*", "*through the middle*" and "*around*

people a few times". Mary's desire to keep moving underscored her experience of the sticky atmosphere as difficult to escape.

Mary's talk also acknowledged that constant movement puts her at risk, having to move away from her friendship group in order to evade the person following her. Defining the atmosphere of the "*big group of friends*" as what kept her safe was contrasted with the singular sticky object of "*this guy*". Her account of moving around the club was therefore understood as putting her at risk, where that risk included being on one's own.

We would argue Mary's account of navigating the club thus presented the student-centred nighttime economy as one that female students have to manage, consciously making decisions about how to behave. Her negotiation of safety and risk thus supported accounts of women's self-management in the nighttime economy more generally (Sheard 2011; Meyer 2010; Gunby et al. 2017). This was further evidenced later in the discussion, when Mary expanded on the tactics used to shape the affective atmosphere:

Extract 6

Mary: I kinda felt like that but I think being at Uni I've sort of worked out what works to get people to stay away from me. So I'll give a guy a really dirty look and he'd instantly know to walk away, or if he gets too close to me I'll kinda, like-this sounds really bad like, I'll kind of punt him in the back and he'll just move away. There's this thing where I'll stick my knuckle up and just dig it into his back and he just moves, but, or like, I'll step on his foot and like do-deliberately, like and that would usually get them away.

As in Extract 5, Mary's sense of control over the affective atmosphere was important in how she described avoiding lad culture. She presented this control as a

knowledgeable position: a result of having been at university, this space in itself necessitating the creation of strategies to "*get people to stay away from me*". In analysing these discussions, we do not want to present young women as problematic in identifying strategies for avoiding men that they find predatory. However, strategizing the likeliness of encountering lad culture meant that Mary was managing her behaviours and actions, in a space that was otherwise meant to be about hedonism and pleasure (i.e. Anne's account in Extract 4 of "*just going for it cos we loved it* [the song] *so much*"). For Mary and others in the group, it meant being able to prevent, avoid and stop unsolicited male attention. But this strategizing also meant that our participants became responsible for deflecting lad culture, rather than witnessing cultural change where they could occupy the nighttime economy free from concern: a logic that we argue fits the neoliberal model of the University and the nighttime economy.

Above, we discuss participants' storied accounts of how lad culture stuck, and their attempts to unstick themselves. As hinted above, there was also a sense in our participants' talk that the atmosphere of lad culture was difficult to escape. Below we develop this, exploring moments where the sticky atmosphere of lad culture permeated every available space within the student-centred nighttime economy.

"It happens every night, everywhere"

Despite attempts at escaping, avoiding or fighting off lad culture, there was an overarching sense that these experiences were an inevitable component of student life. Alongside individual stories of such experiences, the participants created in their talk a sensation that lad culture was all-pervasive and unavoidable. For example:

Extract 7

Anne: Yeah like, the-it's constant-it's like constant. Like you can always guarantee it would happen. But obviously, there's always different practices on a night out that can depend on that actually happening. But it'll-will happen to someone at least, or at least one or two people every night out. There is, I guarantee you it happened on Tuesday, Wednesday, people went out today, if people go out, definitely tomorrow, like, it'll-is always a constant. But that's an element of a night out specially at University.

In Anne's extract, she identified the effects of lad culture as relentless to the point of becoming a taken-for-granted *"element of a night out"*. The pervasiveness of the atmosphere was emphasised by repetition of the word 'constant', and calling off nights of the week: "*it happened on Tuesday, Wednesday, people went out today* [Thursday]*, if people go out definitely tomorrow* [Friday]". Although academic accounts of the atmosphere emphasize its ephemeral, transient nature (e.g. Anderson 2009), there was consistency in this talk, but in ways that made the density of the atmosphere change. One way Anne did this was through making the atmosphere dependent on particular "*practices*" that would make sexual harassment more or less likely. Another change in the density of lad culture was produced through her account of the nights of the week. While lad culture experiences are framed as being a nightly occurrence, Anne claimed that this "*definitely*" happens on a Friday night. The weekend nighttime economy as a notable space for the reproduction of lad culture and associated harassment can be understood as the result of a neoliberal hedonism-seeking culture that encourages economic participation (i.e. drinking) at the end of the working week (Measham & Brain 2005; Roberts 2015; Shaw 2010; Szmigin et al. 2008). However, Anne also located her talk within the context of being "*at University*", marking education as a temporal location where sexism, misogyny and harassment were

particularly pervasive. The all-encompassing experience of lad culture was echoed by Eve, when she stated:

Extract 8

Eve: I don't want other girls to be scared. I want the fear to stop. I don't want any girl to feel like, when they're walking into a club, feel like they are a gazelle walking into a room full of like lions. I don't want any girl to have to go through that. But it-it will. And there'll be more girls leaving a club in tears because of some guy touching her without her consent. It happens every night, everywhere.

Eve's account of lad culture emphasised its affective and emotional components. In contrast to the extracts above (4, 5 and 6), where the participants emphasised agency and could strategize and fight on their own terms, Eve positioned women in clubs as passive "gazelle" and lad culture as predatory "lions". By using this evocative metaphor to describe the enclosed space, Eve deepened the sense of pervasiveness and inevitable fear that accompanies the club, with women metaphorically eaten in a bounded space.

Both extracts 7 and 8 thus presented lad culture as unavoidable, emerging from events (i.e. being touched without consent) but creating an atmosphere of the nighttime that shaped the way the space was experienced. Although we see anger and resentment in these understandings of the space, "*I don't want any girl to have to go through that*", there was also resignation, a feeling the nighttime economy was an 'impossible spaces' for women to occupy (Griffin et al. 2013). In the context of the neoliberal university, which shapes student subjectivities into competitive, consumerist individuals (Phipps & Young 2015a), there was little sense of changing the atmosphere, beyond individual tactics. Instead, for our participants, there was an overwhelming sense of inevitability to these affective encounters.

Discussion

In this article, we argued there is a paucity of work exploring the reproduction of lad culture in the student-centred nighttime economy. To address this gap, we bring together Ahmed (2004) and Anderson's (2009) work to propose a 'sticky atmosphere' that, we argue, illuminates the affective spaces of campus-based sexism and misogyny. The 'sticky atmospheres' allows us to show how being submerged in a physical space, structured by the neoliberalism of both the University and the nighttime economy, impresses upon our participants, shaping how they can act, think and feel. These impressions pertained to feelings of control, in attempts to fight, avoid or escape the atmosphere, but that this atmosphere was experienced as pernicious and pervasive. For us, the location of these emotions, the sociality so often associated with the University, is deeply social and political, where subjective experience is shaped by larger social structures.

In our conclusions, we return to two salient features of the sticky atmosphere. First, we return to a subjectivisation of neoliberal sense making represented in our participants' talk of strategizing, self-management and additional labour. Second, we discuss how these problematic logics do open up a gap, suggesting the sticky atmosphere can be changed.

The idea that neoliberalism shapes Higher Education, the nighttime economy and masculinities in the context of lad culture has been well documented (Dempster 2009; Phipps and Young 2015a; Shaw 2010), as has the idea of the 'psychic life of neoliberalism' (Scharff 2016), creating risk-aware and risk-managing subjects in a space where "regulation and organisation… promotes market and corporate power whilst removing the possibility of locally-based interventions" (Shaw 2010, 898). Thus,

the implications of neoliberalism for challenging lad culture are two-fold. What the extracts above highlight is that the atmosphere created by the physical space of the nighttime economy is experienced as pervasive, unavoidable, and in such a way that students are responsible for their own risk and safety, as *"gazelle walking into a room full of like lions"* (Eve, extract 8). That is, the psychical, political and social elements of the nighttime economy shape its affective components. The students in the Gender Society were thus reliant on a form of self-management to mitigate the risks of lad culture, learning strategies to rid oneself of proximity and assessing people as potential lads.

On the surface, the idea of finding ways to navigate lad culture appears antithetic to the affective surge of an atmosphere. However, in addition to those moments where our participants individualised risk, we would suggest that, across the themes analysed above, their talk speaks to the affective dimensions of living within neoliberalism. Our participants were exasperated with responding to lad culture, weary at having to identify other students as 'lads' or 'friends', and suspended-in-action by the feeling that little could be done. Such feeling seems, to us, to capture perfectly the sensations of our current moment.

Our analysis is based on a small sample of 7 students. However, we suggest a valuable contribution can be made by analysing their talk through the framework of a sticky atmosphere. Although we suggest their responses are underpinned by neoliberal sense making, their resistance to and mechanisms with which to escape the atmosphere do suggest the atmosphere *can change or can stick differently*. The capacity for these affective intensities to be otherwise suggests the possibility to challenge the pervasiveness of lad culture and campus-based sexism and misogyny. Such a reimagining of space requires further action-based research and activism. More

importantly, the changeability of the atmosphere suggests Universities, drinking establishments and urban planners could be part of the transformation of space, being important in the network of relations that confronts how masculinity can be performed. Used in such ways, the concept of sticky atmospheres could be harnessed to change young people's experiences of misogyny, sexism and sexual harassment in Higher Education.

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